

This document summarizes the first National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Coordinators Meeting. This document provides a report to Sanctuary Advisory Council members, NMSP staff, and members of the general public on the subjects discussed during this meeting and steps that are being taken to follow up on the meeting.

Workshop Report: National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Coordinators Meeting

Introduction

The National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP), a federally managed marine protected area program, received authority from Congress in 1992 to establish advisory councils to provide advice to Sanctuary Managers regarding the designation and management of National Marine Sanctuaries. Sanctuary Advisory Councils operate at seven existing Sanctuaries and one proposed Sanctuary; the NMSP intends to establish Councils at all twelve and in any new sanctuaries added to the system.



Council Success Stories



Provide good cross-sectional representation of the community
Help in building constituencies in the community
Help build awareness and support of sanctuary in the community
Help build sense of ownership and empowerment in the community
Provide information on key issues
Provide guidance on prioritizing and dealing with key issues
Bring new issues to the attention of the sanctuary
Provide advice in various aspects of sanctuary operation
Serve as forum for public participation
Disseminate information to the public
Help resolve use conflicts

The NMSP held its first national workshop on Sanctuary Advisory Councils on May 3 and 4, 2000. The workshop was attended by Council coordinators from all sanctuaries that have Councils and representatives from sanctuaries that do not have Councils. During this meeting, hosted by the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary in Port Angeles, Washington, participants:

- Identified and developed means to implement roles and activities of Councils;
- Identified and developed ways to mitigate concerns about Councils;
- Helped Council coordinators become familiar with major provisions of the draft Council Implementation Handbook; and
- Provided for better communication and coordination among Council coordinators and the Councils themselves.

Day 1

On the first day of the workshop, participants focused on identifying the successes and concerns associated with Councils.

The successes identified by the workshop participants fell into three main areas: linking the community and the sanctuary; helping to identify, prioritize, and resolve issues; and reviewing and providing advice on aspects of sanctuary management and operation.

The concerns identified by the workshop participants were somewhat harder to categorize into general areas, since each sanctuary has encountered somewhat different problems and concerns with its individual Council. Concerns were discussed in more detail on the second day of the workshop.

The coordinators then discussed the major activities which they, as a group, felt were the most critical for Council involvement. Over seventy activities were listed, which were then prioritized. A very clear division in importance (by numerical scoring) was found between the top nine and the remainder. According to this list of activities, Councils should:

1. Serve as liaisons between the sanctuary and its community, disseminating information about the sanctuary to the various constituencies of members and bringing the concerns of constituents and the public to the sanctuary staff;
2. Assist in identifying potential partners and constituent groups with whom the sanctuary should be working;
3. Help identify and resolve issues and conflicts, including emerging issues of which the sanctuary might not be aware;
4. Prepare annual work plans that identify those issues and projects in which the Council will be involved in the coming year;
5. Hold an annual retreat for Council members and sanctuary staff;
6. Review and provide input on sanctuary plans, proposals, and products;
7. Help support friends' groups;
8. Provide technical and background information on issues facing the sanctuary; and
9. Validate the accuracy and quality of information that the sanctuary uses for decision-making purposes.

The day concluded by developing an assessment of how each of those top activities could be implemented. The results of this assessment will be included as discussions in the draft Council

Implementation Handbook.

Day 2

The second day of the workshop began with a review of the concerns about Councils that had been identified the prior day. Over forty concerns were organized into five main categories: roles and responsibilities, communications, membership, Council dynamics, and sanctuary/Council relations. Participants broke into groups to address each of these categories. Each group reviewed and condensed the concerns in that category to avoid duplication and then identified options for addressing those concerns (Table 1). Some concerns in different categories were duplicative, so the categories were eliminated in the following table.

The next portion of the day was spent in going over the draft Council Implementation Handbook and ensuring the familiarity of the participants with the sections and provisions; and in addressing site specific Council problems.

The day ended with a discussion of actions that may be taken to follow up on some of the suggestions arising from the workshop.

Conclusion

The participants were enthusiastic about the workshop and wanted to build upon the momentum it generated. Follow-up actions already underway include:

- completion and publishing of the Council Implementation Handbook;
- development of a workshop to bring together Council chairs and coordinators;
- establishment of mechanisms to continue communication among Council coordinators; and
- establishment of several short-term working groups to address key suggestions made during the workshop.

For additional information contact:

Elizabeth Moore
National Marine Sanctuary Program
1305 East West Highway, N/ORM6
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
(301) 713-3141x170
elizabeth.moore@noaa.gov

Table 1: Concerns and Options to Address Them

Concern	Options to Address the Concern
Members are unsure about their roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hold retreat and query members • describe roles of seats in charter or handbook
Members are not in touch with constituents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask members to set up geographic or issue specific groups • ask members to establish regular meetings/forums with constituents • ask members to involve constituents in sanctuary events • provide sanctuary support to members to help them reach constituents • ask members to report on activities to connect with constituents • provide training on how to communicate with constituents
Members lose interest in Council meetings and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incorporate an element of “fun” into Council meetings and activities • have staff make personal connections with members • work with the Council to set priorities and take ownership of problems/issues • make sure the sanctuary has realistic expectations for the Council • don’t overload Council with too many meetings or tasks • have mechanisms in place to engage the Council during times of “hot” issues and have less activity on a normal basis
Single or a few members are dominating the Council meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask Chair to call on and encourage quieter members of Council • ask Chair to keep Council meetings on schedule and focused on agenda items • develop and post a code of conduct at Council meetings • ask executive committee (Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary) to deal with problematic members immediately, outside Council meetings • provide for a standardized, multi-level “reprimand” system for problematic members and keep track of “violations”
Problematic member must be removed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a removal policy with standardized grounds and procedures for removing members
Public is not sure of or interested in what the Council does	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create information products that talk about the Council as a body, the role of each seat, and bios of members • involve Council members at sanctuary events • ask and provide support for members to reach out to constituents
Council does not support sanctuary’s priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educate the Council about the sanctuary’s priorities during a retreat • provide the Council with options on what and how to be involved • work with the Council to realign their priorities through explanation, alternatives, and compromises
Council wishes to exceed their authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a standard briefing package for manager to deliver to each Council • re-examine charter and determine where restrictive language could be lightened or rephrased in positive terms • train managers in how to deal with strong-minded people

Table 1 Continued

Concern	Options to Address the Concern
Councils focus too much on how they do business and not on making decisions and taking action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a strong Chair • focus agendas on action items and allow enough time for discussion • hold retreat to resolve issues • use facilitation or mediation to resolve issues • provide training for both Council Chairs and sanctuary staff
Representation on Council is a problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consider all factors to ensure representativeness (e.g., sanctuary goals, size, and programs; geography of region; gender and diversity balance; and integrated thinking (i.e., no single issue members) • identify alternatives as appropriate, such as an interagency working group instead of governmental members on Councils and having government agencies sitting as non-voting members • regularly review membership to ensure that membership meets the needs of the sanctuary
Councils and sanctuaries are not communicating well with each other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide for manager's report at Council meetings • provide opportunities for members to report to Council • hold regular meetings among Chair, manager, and coordinator • provide training in clear communication techniques, conflict resolution, and group dynamics
National office needs to provide better support to Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase the amount of staff time dedicated to Councils at the national office • finalize and publish Council Implementation Handbook • provide mechanisms for council coordination (e.g., annual workshops, group email address, etc.)